

# **INTRODUCTION**

North Carolina has been blessed with a rich and varied tapestry of lands and waters. The landscape stretches from the Tidewater's ocean beaches, sounds and marshes westward through flat Coastal Plain swamp forests to the rolling Piedmont and on to ancient and hauntingly beautiful mountains, well-known and loved not just by North Carolinians, but by millions of Americans nationwide. Traversing and connecting this landscape are beautiful rivers and streams. These lands and waters provide not only breathtaking scenery and magnificent settings for outdoor recreation, but also serve to support a rich diversity of plant and animal life. North Carolina is indeed "Naturally Wonderful".

## **STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN LEGAL MANDATE**

Since passage of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965, preparation of a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) has been required in order for states to be eligible for LWCF acquisition and development assistance. Past SCORPs and this edition have provided a coordinated framework addressing the problems, needs, and opportunities related to the need for improved public outdoor recreation. The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, the state agency with authority to represent and act for the state for purposes of the LWCF Act, has prepared this plan.

The plan contents and format are shaped by the planning guidelines of the LWCF Act. The major requirements are comprehensiveness; an evaluation of the demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities in the state; a wetlands priority component; a program for implementation of the plan; ample public participation in the planning process; and a description of process and methodology. The plan has been prepared to both meet requirements for continuing LWCF eligibility and meet the need for meaningful evaluation of state and local government public outdoor recreation projects.

Chapter I presents the issues identified for 2003-2008. The issues were developed through public meetings, outreach efforts, and a statewide issues survey sent to recreation agencies, organizations, and other interested parties. Issues were also identified in the 2000 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment and the 2002 Environmental Education Fund General Survey.

Chapter II contains two indicators of existing and future need for outdoor recreation areas and facilities. It presents the results of a statewide survey of the general population that measures current participation levels and future demand for 43 outdoor recreation activities. It also reports the results of an inventory of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities in North Carolina and makes comparisons county by county and statewide. Detailed county profiles are provided in Appendix A. LWCF assistance will be awarded to counties showing higher relative needs using the state's Open Project Selection Process.

Chapter III describes the roles and responsibilities of federal, state, local, private, and commercial outdoor recreation providers in the state. Chapter IV identifies trends affecting outdoor recreation and the concomitant changes they will bring.

Chapter V contains an overview of the state's involvement with natural diversity identification and preservation. Chapter VI contains the federally mandated wetlands component, developed in coordination with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. Chapter VII includes actions the state will be undertaking over the next five years to address the issues and needs identified in this plan.

While the level of LWCF apportionments recently available to North Carolina has lessened the LWCF program's impact, LWCF funds still serve to address issues of statewide importance and to help improve outdoor recreation in North Carolina.

Ample public participation, described in the document, went into development of this plan. A final draft plan was also made available via the internet for public review and comment.

## SETTING FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

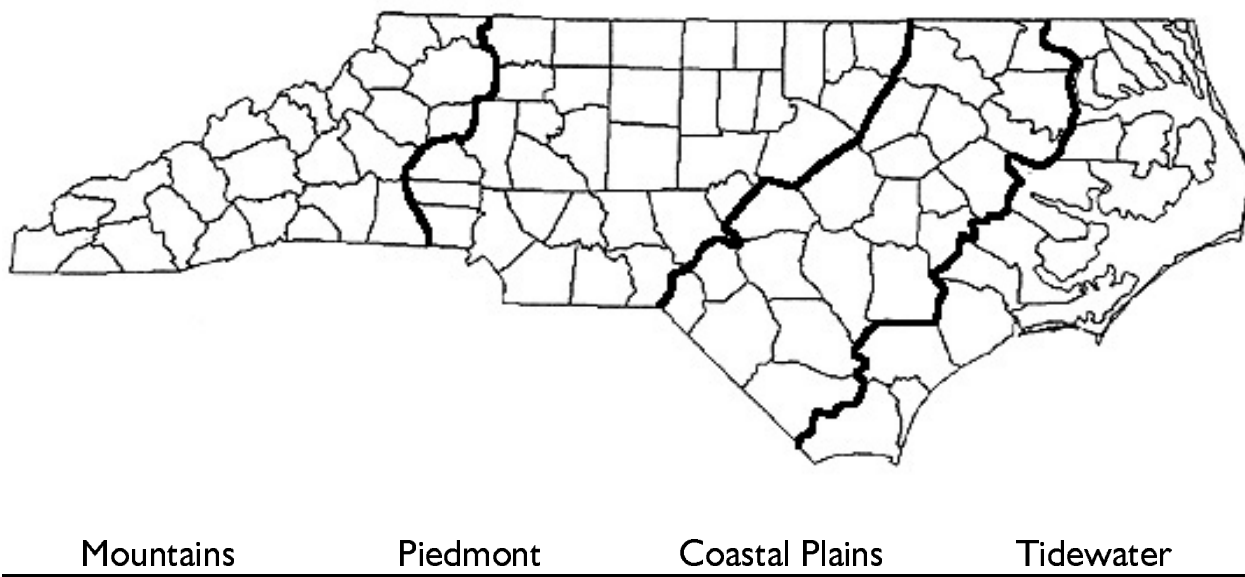
### Location and Geography

North Carolina, located in the southeastern United States, is bounded by Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, and the Atlantic Ocean. The state is divided into four natural regions: mountain, piedmont, coastal plains, and tidewater (Figure i-1).

Figure i-1.

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Geographic Regions in North Carolina



The mountain region is located in the west and runs parallel with the Tennessee border for approximately 200 miles. The Blue Ridge Mountains contain the highest elevations and most rugged topography in the Appalachian Mountain system. Forty-three peaks have elevations above 6,000 feet. Mount Mitchell, at an elevation of 6,684 feet, is the highest peak east of the Mississippi River. The topography also includes valleys and gorges, such as the Linville Gorge.

The Piedmont region, located in central North Carolina, is bounded by the Blue Ridge Mountain scarp in the west and the coastal plains fall line in the east. The region consists mainly of rolling hills. Exceptions include monadnocks, such as Pilot Mountain, which are formed by more resistant rock and rise above the normal terrain. Large rivers, such as the Yadkin and the Catawba, cross the region. Reservoirs created by impoundments on these rivers form the only lakes in the region.

The coastal plains are defined by the Piedmont hills on the west and the counties affected by tidal action in the east. The region, which is almost 100 miles wide, rises less than 500 feet in elevation from east to west. The slight increase in elevation creates slow-moving rivers. The region also contains most of the natural lakes found in North Carolina.

The tidewater region is formed by a large system of sounds and off-shore barrier islands. These features create over 3,000 miles of shoreline affected by tidal waters.

### **North Carolina in the 2000s**

North Carolina's population will grow from 8.05 million in 2000 to over 9.47 million by 2010, a 17.6% jump. Most of the growth will come from net migration (72 percent), with natural growth (births less deaths) accounting for the balance. North Carolina ranked as the eleventh most populous state in the nation in 2001.

The median age in North Carolina rose from 33.1 in 1990 to 35.3 years in 2000. In the next decade, as the oldest baby-boomers hit age 65, the median age will continue to rise. The elderly will become an even larger percentage of North Carolina's population.

The increase of high-tech industries and the growth of urban centers have created a more affluent and cosmopolitan population. North Carolina has become a predominately urban state. As the state has developed, farms and forests have been lost and natural resources increasingly negatively impacted. Protection and conservation of the state's natural heritage has become an increasingly important issue.

## **NORTH CAROLINA CONSTITUTION**

Article XIV, Section 5, of the North Carolina Constitution sets overall conservation policy by broadly defining the conservation and protection of natural resources and the acquisition of such resources as a proper function of government. The amendment is a strong statement of North Carolina's public policy to protect its natural resources and reads in part as follows:

*It shall be the policy of this State to conserve and protect its lands and waters for the benefit of all its citizenry, and to this end it shall be a proper function of the State of North Carolina and its political subdivision to acquire and preserve park, recreation, and scenic areas, to control and limit the pollution of our air and water, to control excessive noise, and in every other appropriate way to preserve as a part of the common heritage of this state its forests, wetlands, estuaries, beaches, historical sites, open land, and places of beauty.*

### **A COMMITMENT TO OUTDOOR RECREATION**

The wide array of outdoor recreation activities creates many diverse interest groups. Natural resource conservationists, sports enthusiasts, hunters, and trailer campers all use parks and recreational resources for different and, at times, conflicting reasons. Local, state, and federal agencies have different responsibilities for providing recreation.

North Carolina is facing many challenges for outdoor recreational areas and services. Population growth, affluence, single-parent families, two-income households, and a growing elderly population will produce changing and greater public expectations.

North Carolina must meet these challenges with fewer resources than have been available in the past. The federal government played a major role in funding outdoor recreation from the late 1960s through the 1980s, but the federal government role has been shrinking. State revenue shortfalls in recent years have not yet abated, and local governments are also dealing with fiscal challenges.

If the state is going to effectively address its outdoor recreational needs, the commitment must come from within North Carolina. A cooperative effort is needed from all interested agencies, groups, and individuals to build support for quality recreational opportunities and natural resource conservation.